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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: THE NEW FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

1. (U) Summary: The new European Parliament (EP) Foreign Affairs Committee will be the largest EP committee, with 78 members. The Committee is responsible for drafting reports and making recommendations on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) topics, European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), enlargement of the EU, international agreements, and relations with other international organizations. Although the EP does not enjoy much decision-making power in these areas compared to other EU policy areas, such as transport or the environment, the Foreign Affairs Committee remains one of the most prestigious of the EP's committees, and routinely attracts the largest number of applicants. Two newly created subcommittees -- one on human rights, the other on security and defense -- will assist the main committee. Elmar Brok, a German MEP from the center-right EPP-ED, will remain Committee chairman. End Summary.

ROLE AND COMPETENCES

2. (U) The EP Foreign Affairs Committee, with 78 members, will remain the largest EP committee. According to the EP's rules of procedure, the Committee is responsible for the following issues: CFSP and ESDP, on which it will be assisted by a newly created subcommittee for security and defense; relations with the UN and other international organizations; the strengthening of political relations with third countries through cooperation and assistance programs or international agreements such as association and partnership agreements; opening, monitoring, and concluding EU accession negotiations; and questions relating to human rights, the protection of minorities, and the promotion of democratic values in third countries, on which the Committee will be assisted by the new subcommittee on human rights.

3. (U) The EP does not have much formal decision-making power in most foreign policy areas, especially defense and security matters; EU member states, meeting as the Council, often ignore the EP's opinion. However, over the years, the EP has at times used its few available instruments -- such as the requirement for EP assent to Association Agreements with third countries and EP control over the EU budget -- to exert some influence in this area.

THE MOST POPULAR COMMITTEE

4. (U) Even with such limited legislative power, the Foreign Affairs Committee has always been considered the most prestigious committee in the EP, with the largest number of applications for membership.

BACKGROUND: Once elected, MEPs rank their preferences for committee and delegation assignments. Not all MEPs, however, become members of their "first choice" committee, as committee and delegation memberships are assigned among the political groups according to the size of the groups. Ensuring balanced representation from political groups and nationalities on all of the various committees is a difficult exercise. Harsh negotiating is usual inside each political group -- both between member-state delegations and between individual MEPs -- for membership nominations and for leadership positions (chairman, vice-chairman and political group coordinator.) END BACKGROUND.

WHO'S WHO IN THE NEW COMMITTEE

5. (U) The Committee held its constitutive meeting on July 22 in Strasbourg and elected its chairman

and vice-chairmen by acclamation. Since the political group leaders negotiate committee chairmanships in advance, the election is usually only a procedural action with one candidate per position to be filled. The committee leaders and political group coordinators are (with the exception of the Socialist coordinator, who has not yet been appointed):

-- Elmar Brok (Germany, EPP-ED), Chairman: After receiving a degree in law and politics, Brok worked briefly as a journalist but quickly moved into politics. An "old-timer" among MEPs despite being only 58, Brok has been in office since 1979 and was the Committee's chairman during the last parliamentary term. He also was (and will almost certainly remain) the EPP coordinator for institutional issues -- he was an active participant in the Convention on the Future of Europe and one of the "EP envoys" to the Inter-Governmental Conference that negotiated the EU Constitutional Treaty. His flamboyant and direct style leaves no one indifferent in the EP. Like most German Christian-Democrat MEPs, Brok describes himself as an ally of the U.S. -- despite frequent criticism of U.S. "unilateralism" and his opposition to U.S. positions on Guantanamo, the ICC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the death penalty.

-- Geoffrey Van Orden (UK, EPP-ED), First Vice Chairman: A retired Brigadier General, 59-year-old Van Orden held senior positions at NATO and in the European Commission before being elected to the EP as a member of the British Conservative Party. He was Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament and is a specialist in defense issues. Van Orden, who has worked closely with the Mission, is among NATO's strongest advocates in the EP.

-- Toomas-Hendrik Ilves (Estonia, PES), Second Vice Chairman: Ilves, 49, grew up in the United States and spent much of his adult life there. He studied psychology at Columbia University and then later headed Radio Free Europe's Estonian service from Munich. He renounced his U.S. citizenship soon after Estonia regained independence and became Estonian Ambassador to the U.S. in 1993, followed by accreditation to Canada as well in 1994. From 1999-2002, he was Estonia's foreign minister, playing a key role in negotiating Estonia's accession to the EU. He became an EP observer for his country in 2003. Ilves declared in a recent interview that he hopes to revise the EU's "naive" policy toward Russia and also to focus on European security policy, especially terrorism.

-- Baroness Emma Nicholson (UK, ALDE), Third Vice-Chairman: A trained musician and computer designer, Emma Nicholson, 63, was also long active in the Save the Children fund. She was the Vice-Chairman of the Conservative Party before quitting to join the Liberal Democrats in 1995. She has been a Life Peer and member of the British House of Lords since 1997. A close contact of USEU, Nicholson was the EP rapporteur on Iraq and voiced strong support for U.S. military action. However, she introduced an ongoing source of transatlantic friction when she lionized the "Romanian adoption scandal" that led to the moratorium on international adoption from Romania.

-- Jose Ignacio Salafranca (Spain, EPP-ED), EPP-ED coordinator: A professor of European law, Salafranca was elected to the EP in 1994. He retains his position as the Committee's EPP-ED coordinator and has since 2001 also been the EPP-ED spokesman in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Salafranca, 49, is a specialist in Latin American issues and, in addition to representing the EP at the last two EU-Latin America Summits, he was responsible for EP reports on EU-Latin America relations, Association Agreements with Chile and Mexico, and the Andean community. He proved a good contact of the Mission during the last Parliamentary term.

-- Armin Laschet (Germany, EPP-ED), EPP-ED coordinator: A lawyer, journalist, and publisher, Laschet launched his political career in Germany in the nineties, becoming a member of the Bundestag in 1994 and being elected to the EP in 1999. Particularly interested in the UN (he is a member of the executive council of the German United Nations Society), he was appointed in 2003 to draft the EP report on EU-UN relations.

-- Annemie Neyts (Belgium, ALDE), ALDE coordinator:
A French teacher in Flanders, the 60-year-old Neyts
began her political career at a young age, rising
through the Flemish Liberal Party (VLD). She became
the party's chairman for the Brussels region in
1995. Belgium's Minister of Trade during the late-
2001 Belgian EU Presidency, she presided over the EU
Council during the Doha trade talks. She was an MEP
from 1994 to 1999, prior to her ministerial post.
Neyts recently attended the U.S. Democratic
Convention in Boston, invited by Madeleine Albright.

16. (U) In addition to these key MEPs, the
Committee's many high-profile members include former
Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis (EPP-ED);
three former prime ministers -- Denmark's Poul Nyrup
Rasmussen (current leader of the European
Socialists), France's Michel Rocard (PES), and
Italy's Massimo D'Alema (PES); and four former
foreign ministers -- Finland's Paavo Vayrynen
(ALDE), the Czech Republic's Josef Zieleniec (EPP-
ED), Cyprus' Ioannis Kasoulides (EPP-ED), and
Luxembourg's Lydie Polfer (ALDE). Other prominent
figures include two former European Commissioners,
Italian Emma Bonino (ALDE) and Portuguese Joao de
Deus Pinheiro (EPP-ED); German Greens leader
Angelika Beer; and Philippe Morillon (France, EPP-
ED), former commander of UN forces in Bosnia.

SAMMIS